

DOWN TO EARTH

Railway sells tickets to non-passengers

By Khalilur Rahman



"If contraceptives are sold in black market it is a welcome sign. This reflects urgency on the part of our fertile couples to adopt family planning measures. Government has identified population explosion as the 'Number One' national problem and black-marketing of birth control materials will enormously help overcome the problem."

Former Health and Family Planning Minister and now a member of the Presidium of Awami League, Abdul Mannan made this observation years ago when I drew his attention to a news about selling of contraceptives in black market. I interviewed the minister for a health and medical journal.

One may feel some amount of fun in the comment of the former Health Minister but the wisdom of his statement can be accepted without any hesitation.

But selling of railway tickets in black market, which continues unabated for quite a long time has been serving a different purpose. It has aggravated the sufferings of an ever-increasing number of railway passengers. Amenities available for them at the stations and on board the coaches during train journey are too limited. The volume of financial loss to the Railway has turned this most vital communication sector commercially unviable.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman in his budget speech in Parliament on June 12 said the Bangladesh Railway had been incurring an annual loss of about Taka 150 crore for the last few years. Presenting the national budget for the year 1991-92, the Finance Minister attributed the loss of the Railway to excessive manpower, purchase of unnecessary and excessive equipment and operational inefficiency. Since 1979 the organisation did not earn any profit, he added.

One important aspect was missing in the Finance Minister's speech — that relates to the harassment and

sufferings of innumerable railway passengers throughout the year. The situation becomes more critical during religious festivals.

For the last two weeks there has been, like previous years, a heavy rush of passengers at the Kamalapur Railway Station on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha to be observed on June 24. Thousands of people gather at this vast railway station every day for advance bookings or daily tickets. The station hums with unusual activities. But all of those who assemble almost round the clock are not genuine passengers.

Quite a large number of people, from street urchins to unemployed men, in connivance with a section of the unscrupulous Railway staff keep the booking counters under control, Railway sources said. Long before the booking counters are opened for issuing advance or daily tickets these elements form queues and tickets are quickly sold to them. The bonafide passengers return empty-handed as the tickets are exhausted. A very few passengers can take the advantage of receiving the tickets directly from the counters as they are heavily outnumbered.

Explaining the reason for selling tickets to non-passengers a Railway Ministry source said anybody approaching the counters with the requisite value of tickets cannot be refused. There is no way of identifying a black marketer or a genuine passenger, he asserted. But many of the genuine passengers who gathered at Kamalapur Railway Station complained that it was very easy for Railway men or police on duty to apprehend a black marketer by his very appearance. The man behind the counter is well acquainted with their faces because they are in control of the counters and it is not possible for an outsider to penetrate the strong ring of the black marketers, they told The Daily Star.

A teacher of a high school in the city gave a different story. He said irregularity, in issuing tickets from the counters when the number of passengers is too high on the eve of festival is a common phenomenon. The teacher who bought a ticket directly from the counter at a station outside Dhaka was charged by the checker during the journey for having a duplicate one. "I was shocked and felt humiliated in presence of so many passengers in the compartment and could convince the checker about my innocence after much difficulty. Then I felt relieved when several other passengers in the compartment were found with such duplicate tickets. They were received by the booking counter, the teacher said. The checker got down for another compartment quietly at the next stoppage.

During the last fortnight the number of duplicate tickets issued from Sylhet Railway Station has considerably increased. Passengers are fighting each other after boarding the coaches due to duplicate numbers and at times the journey is being delayed for unhappy incidents. A Railway source said two booking clerks of the Sylhet Railway Station were put under suspension in this connection last week.

Another passenger who failed to procure tickets for himself and two of his family members of inter-city train, "Upakul", from Dhaka to Noakhali, also complained that some of the innocent passengers were deceived by the black marketers with simple gate passes sold to them as tickets. They are then caught in the running trains and penalised by the checkers.

A Railway Ministry source said the crisis arising out of selling tickets in black market could only be solved through increasing the number of trains. Without this, all other measures, if taken, are bound to fail, the source said.

Sufia Kamal honoured

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Mahila Parisad in celebration of 80th birth anniversary of Begum Sufia Kamal arranged a function at Business and Professional Club auditorium on Thursday in the city.

Speaking on the occasion Begum Sufia Kamal said that the women folk of the country should come forward to face all sorts of problems and expressed her gratitude to the organisers for giving her the rare honour in this old age.

Ayesha Khanam, Secretary of the Parisad read out the address of welcome in the function which was addressed among others by Fatema Hossain, Laki Inam, Ifiat Ara Huq, and Jahanara Nisi.

AM College

From Page 1 Col. 8

Chhatra League was pressuring the college authorities for recounting the votes cast in favour of general secretary candidates in the college students union election held on June 26.

Jatityabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) has bagged the post of general secretary with a margin of single vote.

The BCL bagged 13 posts including that of VP out of 16. The JCD bagged three posts including that of the general secretary.

Ghorasal blast

From Page 1 Col. 7



Three of the persons injured in blast on Wednesday night at Ghorasal urea plant under treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

—Star photo

Residents in the factory compound inhaled highly toxic ammonia gas. Many jumped from the multi-storied buildings of the staff quarters and were injured, witnesses said.

Parts of the plant were blown several metres away, a resident employee of the factory reported.

According to factory officials, the Balancing, Modernisation, Renovation and Expansion (BMRE) programme of the plant was undertaken to increase the per day production of urea to 1422 tons from 1137 tons.

Wednesday's explosion stopped production at the factory and resumption of production is now uncertain, sources said.

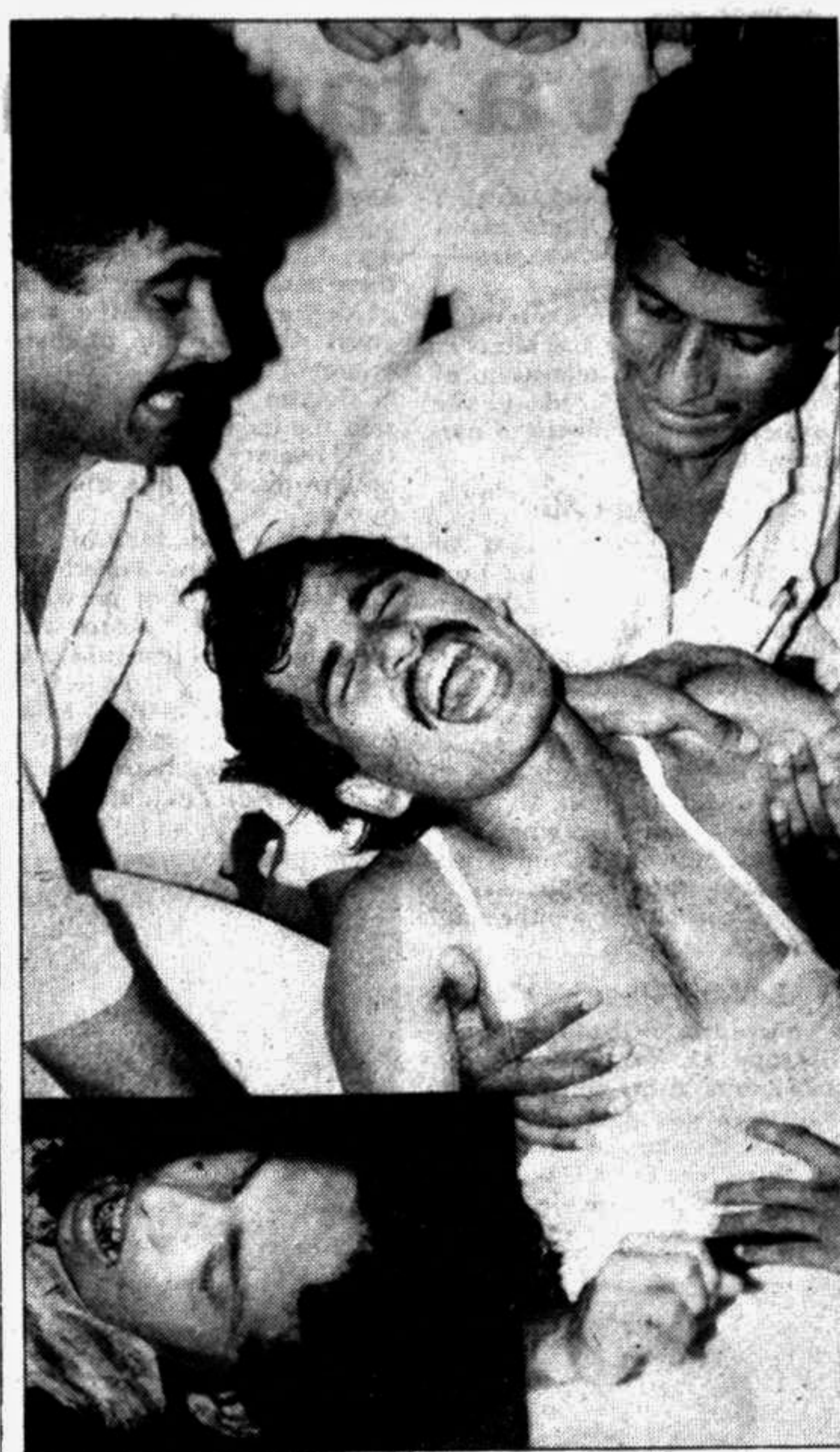
Industries Minister Shamsul Islam Khan, Chairman of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) Nefaur Rahman, local MP Dr Moin Khan and other high officials visited the spot.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Engineers in a statement condemned the death of the Additional Chief Engineer of the Fertilizer Factory and others in the blast.

Meanwhile UNB says: Deputy Leader of the House Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury told Parliament Thursday morning that the blast in the factory killed eight people and injured 22 others including foreigners.

The injured included eight foreign experts working on the plant. Prof Chowdhury informed the Sangsad.

Operation of the factory was suspended a fortnight ago for renovation and resumed Thursday, sources at the Ministry of Industries said.



The younger brother of JSD (Inu)-backed Chhatra League leader Mahbub (inset) who was killed in a gunbattle with Awami League's student front activists on the Dhaka University campus Thursday is wailing over his brother's body.

—Star photo

Student shot dead

From Page 1 Col. 7

Moniruzzaman Miah along with the Pro-VC visited the injured person at DMCH in the evening.

Meanwhile, the authorities suspended Thursday's Senate session and a DU Syndicate meeting has been scheduled for this morning to discuss the situation.

The university went on Eid holiday from Thursday.

Later at a press conference at the Press Club Chhatra League (N-S) leaders alleged that when their procession was going towards VC's residence from Mohsin Hall then some armed terrorists of Chhatra League (A-A) fired on the procession indiscriminately and killed Mahbub on the spot.

They said that they arranged the procession to protest terrorist activities on the campus by armed hooligans who are staying at the DU halls.

BSS adds: General Secretary of Bangladesh Awami League Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, MP, in a statement Thursday night expressed deep shock at the pre-mature death of Mahbubur Rahman, a student of Islamic History department of Dhaka University.

She condemned the killing and demanded exemplary punishment of the killers.

In another statement, National Democratic Party (NDP) leader Gias Uddin Kader Chowdhury, expressed deep shock and grave concern at the killing of Mahbubur Rahman.

The Chinese government is now doing away with barter system. The only other country with whom China has this system is the DPRK which would expire this year. The barter protocol with Bangladesh shall remain in force for one year.

Under the economic and technical agreement China would provide an interest free loan of 60 million Yuan equivalent to over Taka 40 crore as commodity and project aid. The loan shall have to be repaid by Bangladesh in annual instalment over a period of ten years from August 2001 to July 31, 2011 with grace period of ten years between 1991 to 2001.

Under the third agreement signed the Chinese government would provide 200 power tillers and necessary accessories on grant basis.

Earlier, Chinese Premier Li Peng announced during the official talks between Bangladesh and China yesterday about the interest free loan and the power tillers grant.

Mirza Golam Hafiz said that he himself took the Awami

Rao forms govt

From Page 1 Col. 5

choice of the party for the top parliamentary post after two days of hectic lobbying and confabulations at various levels in the party.

A meeting of the Central Parliamentary Board was held here late last night to resolve the issue of procedure of selection of the Parliamentary Party leader in the wake of an assertion by Suresh Kalmadi, a close associate of Pawar, that the demand for secret ballot was gaining ground.

The parliamentary board meeting, which was also attended by Pawar and five other

party chief minister as special invitees, unanimously decided to ask senior party leaders K Karunakaran and Siddhantha Shanker Ray to ascertain the views of the members in the matter today.

Even as the two leader were in the process of ascertaining the views of party members Pawar called on the party president Rao to extend him support to facilitate the unanimous election of the leader.

Rao, who turns 70 on Friday, became party president after the May 21 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The Midnight File

Pak major, 7 others killed in Indian shelling

MUZAFFARABAD (Pakistan-controlled Kashmir), June 20: Eight people, including a Pakistan army major, were killed and 17 injured today when Indian army soldiers shelled a border town, witnesses said. The attack on chokotho, some 60 kms (37 miles) east of here, took place at sunrise, they said, when shells landed in the town's main bazaar, reports AFP.

Imelda may be excluded from presidential race

MANILA, June 20: Imelda Marcos may be disqualified herself from the May 1992 presidential election by becoming a naturalised citizen of Tonga, Philippine officials said today, reports AFP.

Kuwait keen to take back drivers

An official statement last night said some Kuwaiti employers showed keen interest of taking back Bangladeshi drivers and cooks who fled the Gulf war. "Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait has informed that some of the Kuwaiti employers are keenly interested to employ Bangladeshi drivers and cooks, who returned from Kuwait," it said. The statement advised the concerned people to send particulars to Bangladesh Overseas Employment and services limited at Dhanmandi, Dhaka or make direct contact with their former employers, reports BSS.

Chinese help

From Page 1 Col. 7

cepted the invitation.

Premier, Li Peng, told Begum Zia that his government would provide all help and co-operation to the various sectors to be identified by Bangladesh for development.

Li told this to Bangladesh Prime Minister when she made a farewell call on her at the Diaoyutai state Guest House at the end of her three-day official goodwill visit to China.

The Chinese Premier expressed his confidence that the government and party of Begum Zia would be able to lead the nation towards the cherished goal of development desired by the people.

Li lauded the role of the present Bangladesh government and rehabilitation efforts undertaken in the cyclone affected areas. He hoped that the present government would meet any challenge with courage and fortitude in improving the lot of the people.

Begum Zia invited the Chinese Premier and Madame Li Peng to visit Bangladesh which they accepted.

The two Prime Ministers termed the visit as successful and significant and opined that this would have a far reaching effect on the bilateral relations of the two friendly countries.

Another report says: The General Secretary of Communist Party of China Jiang Zemin also expressed the hope that the relations between the BNP and the Communist Party of China would further be strengthened under the able leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia.

The Chinese leader said this when Begum Zia made a courtesy call on him at Zhongnanhai here Thursday afternoon. Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, State Minister for Energy and General Resources Dr K Mosharrar Hossain and other members of the Bangladesh delegation were also present on the occasion.

Jiang said the party-to-party relationship between BNP and

CPC during late President Ziaur Rahman was excellent.

A Foreign Office spokesman said the General Secretary had cutshort his visit to Ningxia autonomous region to meet the Bangladesh Prime Minister.

Jiang said late President Zia was well-known in China and he had laid the foundation of friendship between the two countries. Jiang said today the relations between the two countries had become "very strong."

The CPC General Secretary said he was happy that Begum Zia had assumed the charge of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

He also expressed his sympathy for the cyclone affected people of Bangladesh.

Jiang said both Bangladesh and China were Asian neighbouring countries with high population, he said. In fact, population density in Bangladesh was higher than in China.

He gave a resume of the major programmes to curb the population explosion, and said the family planning programme was not so far applicable to minority areas. "But even there we are now preparing to extend family planning programmes as we know the quality of life in those areas can only be improved through adoption of family planning programmes," he said.

He said the reform programmes had now continued in China for ten years. Small and cottage industries in rural areas and township ship have helped agriculture also.

The Communist Party General Secretary also extended an invitation to a BNP party delegation to visit China.

Begum Zia expressed her gratitude for the warm welcome accorded to her and the members of her delegation.

She said Bangladesh-China relations, started by Shaheed President Zia, would be further geared up as "we are now following Zia's ideals." She said relations between BNP and CPC would be strengthened in the days to come.

Debate on amendment bill

From Page 1 Col. 4

Chief Whip of the Opposition Mohammad Nasim sought to know from the Law Minister why the AL bill had not come to the House.

In reply Law Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz said the notice for the AL bill in question was not submitted fulfilling all requirements on April 14, and this was communicated to Abdus Samad Azad well in time.

The said bill was submitted without obtaining a certification from the President. Again it was not accompanied with an estimate of the government expenses involved for implementation of the bill if passed. The notice thus fell flat. But he said that he personally contacted Abdus Samad Azad requesting him to fulfil the requirements and later steps were taken to overcome the initial lapses.

Mirza Golam Hafiz said that he himself took the Awami

League bill to the President on Thursday to obtain certification to ensure its early introduction.

He said that the government did not say it did not have any responsibility for the delay, but the Opposition should also accept its lapses.

The Law Minister assured the Opposition Bench members that both the private members' bills and the government bill would come before the House and the MPs would find many things in common in those bills.

He called for mutual understanding to establish the legal sovereignty of parliament by passing an amendment bill to switch over to a parliamentary system.

Abdus Samad Azad alleged that his bill was delayed by resorting to different tactics and wanted to know why the forwarding of his bill had been delayed.

Opposition MPs Suranjit Sengupta, Maulana Abdus Sobhan, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, Barrister Moudud Ahmed and Tofael Ahmed supported the contention of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali repeatedly asserted that the Parliament Secretariat could not put the bill before the House unless it was accompanied with a certification from the Acting President.

Tofael Ahmed said that the AL bill was meant for implementing the Joint Declaration. The government had failed to obtain a certification for the bill from the President.

The Chief Whip of the Treasury Bench Khandakar Delwar Hossain ended the debate by welcoming the AL members

for trying to go back to the parliamentary system which they themselves had abandoned 16 years ago.

The bill if passed would involve expenses from the public exchequer for implementation. The Election Commission and the Home Ministry had already estimated that Taka 22 crore would be required to hold a referendum.

Khandakar Delwar expressed his surprise that the Opposition Bench chose to have a debate on the issue just on the eve of the Eid vacation.

This was only meant for getting publicity through the media to create an impression that only the Opposition wanted constitutional amendment for a switch over to a parliamentary form.

He informed the House that the AL bill was cleared by a committee only on June 16, and the Parliament Secretariat referred it to the Ministry of Law on June 18. There was thus no justification of questioning the sincerity of the Law Ministry to obtain certification from the President at the earliest.

He urged the opposition members to come to a consensus to pass the proposed constitutional amendment.

The government bill as well as the private members' bill would be put before the House, he said. Without mutual understanding the proposed amendment bill could not be passed because no party had a two-thirds majority in the House. He sought cooperation of all to establish the supremacy of the parliament.

State Minister for Food Barister Nazmul Huda also took part in the debate. The JS was adjourned till June 29.

BNP to move two bills

From Page 1 Col. 8

put to a referendum before its authentication.

Meanwhile, the BNP's legal experts who have worked for a long time to prepare the bills told The Daily Star that if the bill for ratifying the appointment and actions of the Acting President was passed along with the bill for switching over to a parliamentary form of government it would create an embarrassing situation for the Acting President when the bill as a whole would have to be put to a referendum. So the BNP did not want to link the commitment of the three alliances to send Justice Shahabuddin back to the post of Chief Justice with another issue like the formation of the government.

Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali who headed the constitution amendment bill preparation committee of the BNP suggested it in this way.

It is learnt that the Acting President has also expressed his happiness over the separation of the two bills.

The 11th amendment to the Constitution which will be incorporated in the Fourth Schedule has also made provisions for the reinstatement of the Acting President in the post of the Chief Justice as he desired.

The bill of the Awami League also provided that the Acting President would continue his function till the election of a new president under

Clause 48 of the Constitution (after amendment) and he will return to the post of Chief Justice.

There was no basic difference between amendment to the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution incorporated in a single bill proposed by the Awami League and the 11th amendment of the BNP.

Meanwhile, the 12th amendment to the Constitution proposed by the BNP and the 11th amendment to the Constitution proposed by the Awami League have been sent to the President for his approval.

The BNP in its proposed bill made a new provision that the President of the Republic would be elected in Parliament and that the election would be presided over by the Speaker.

On the other hand the Awami League proposed bill mentioned that the election of the President of the Republic in the parliamentary system should be conducted by the election commission as was in the 1972 constitution.

The BNP bill has adopted adequate measures to plug floor crossing individually or in a group while the Awami League bill has opted for blocking floor crossing only by any individual as was mentioned in the 1972 Constitution.

The BNP proposed bill provides that one-fifth of the total members of the cabinet could be inducted from non-MPs while the Awami League

bill conditionalised the appointment of non-MPs as members of parliament that a non-MP Minister would have to be elected member of parliament within a period of six months from the date of his appointment.

However there was no difference between the two bills about the omission of the posts of Vice President and Deputy Prime Ministers and allowing the Speaker to function as Acting President in absence of the President.

Earlier the bill of the Awami League which was notified to Parliament provided that the Acting President will be ultimately elevated to the post of President which was later changed at the Scrutiny Committee.

Besides the bills of the BNP and the Awami League, Rashed Khan Menon of Workers Party also have a notice for changing the Article 142 of the Constitution which provided protection to the eight clauses of the Constitution making provision for a referendum in case of any changes to those articles.

The Article 142 itself is also a protected Article and any change in this Article will require another referendum.

It is learnt that the BNP in its bill has also proposed amendment to the article 66 of the Constitution related to the qualification and disqualification for election to parliament.

Quake hits Philippines

MANILA, June 20: A moderate earthquake which registered 4.7 on the Richter scale shook the northern Philippines on Thursday, seismologists here said. There were no